

CLAIMS

1. A system for delivering digital content on demand in a multiple unit environment, the system comprising:

a server local to the multiple unit environment, the server including a memory storing the digital content and capable of supporting multiple simultaneous asynchronous accesses to the digital content;

a billing system for billing each individual unit based on use of the digital content, the billing system coupled to the server; and

at least one access system in a plurality of units in the multiple unit environment, the access system designed to access the digital content stored in the memory on the server.

2. A system according to claim 1, further comprising means for providing simultaneous asynchronous delivery of the digital content from the memory on the server responsive to requests from multiple access systems in the units.

3. A system according to claim 2, wherein the means for providing simultaneous asynchronous delivery includes software designed to read the digital content from the memory on the server and transmit the digital content to the unit.

4. A system according to claim 1, further comprising controls for pausing the digital content.

5. A system according to claim 1, further comprising controls for randomly accessing the digital content.

6. A system according to claim 1, wherein the digital content includes content available on an internetwork.

7. A system according to claim 1, wherein the digital content includes video.

8. A system according to claim 1, wherein the access system includes a set-top box designed to enable access to the digital content, the set-top box coupled to the server and to a display in the unit.

9. A system according to claim 8, wherein the set-top box is coupled to the server via a switching hub for a network, the switching hub designed to allow a plurality of units to access the server.

5

10. A system according to claim 8, wherein the set-top box is designed to allow access to a non-digital content displayed on the display.

11. A system according to claim 8, wherein the set-top box includes a handset.

10

12. A system according to claim 1, wherein the server includes content metadata about the digital content stored in the memory of the server.

13. A system according to claim 12, the system further comprising:
a user profile including user metadata; and
means for conditionally accessing the digital content based on an interaction between the content metadata and the user metadata.

15

14. A system according to claim 13, wherein:
the user profile includes a filter; and
the means for conditionally accessing the digital content is designed to deny the digital content to the unit if the content metadata about the digital content does not satisfy the filter.

20

15. A system according to claim 14, wherein the user profile is stored in a memory of a second server and is accessible from the server.

25

16. A system according to claim 12, wherein;
the digital content includes video; and
the content metadata includes a rating for the video.

30

17. A system according to claim 12, wherein;
the digital content includes a game; and

the content metadata includes a rating for the game.

18. A system according to claim 1, wherein the server includes a user profile including user metadata.

19. A system according to claim 1, wherein the billing system includes:
a default rate for the digital content; and
a custom rate for the digital content.

20. A system according to claim 19, wherein:
the system further comprises a user profile including a rate key; and
the billing system is designed to use the custom rate when the rate key identifies the custom rate.

21. A system according to claim 20, wherein the user profile is stored in a memory on a second server and is accessible from the server.

22. A system according to claim 20, the system further comprising means for retrieving the user profile from a memory on a second server and storing the user profile in the memory on the server.

23. A system according to claim 19, wherein the billing system further includes a discount rate that can be applied in addition to the default rate or the custom rate.

24. A system according to claim 1, wherein:
the system further comprises:
a user profile including user metadata; and
an advertisement; and
the server is designed to display the advertisement to the unit when the advertisement matches the user metadata.

25. A system according to claim 24, wherein the user profile is stored in a memory on a second server and is accessible from the server.

26. A system according to claim 24, the system further comprising means for retrieving the user profile from a memory on a second server and storing the user profile in the memory on the server.

5

27. A system according to claim 24, wherein the advertisement is stored on a second server and accessible from the server.

28. A system according to claim 24, the system further comprising means for
10 retrieving the advertisement from a second server and storing the advertisement on the server.

29. A system according to claim 1, the system further comprising a digital content selection apparatus, including:

15 a profile tracker designed to track an access to a user profile, the user profile including user metadata;

a profile analyzer designed to analyze the user metadata; and

a digital content delivery apparatus designed to offer digital content satisfying the user metadata.

20 30. A system according to claim 29, wherein:

the system further comprises content metadata about the digital content; and

the digital content delivery apparatus includes:

a metadata comparator designed to compare the content metadata with the user metadata; and

25 a digital content selector designed to select digital content for which the content metadata satisfies the user metadata.

31. A system according to claim 29, the system further comprising a second server including a memory storing the user profile and the digital content, the second server coupled
30 to the server to provide the digital content to the server.

32. A system according to claim 1, the system further comprising a second server offsite from the multiple unit environment, the second server coupled to the server to provide digital content to the server.

5 33. A system according to claim 1, the system further comprising a user profile updater designed to update user metadata about the user profile.

34. A method for delivering digital content, the method comprising:
receiving a request for the digital content from a unit in a multiple unit environment at
10 a server;
accessing the digital content from a memory on the server; and
delivering the digital content to the unit, the delivery of the digital content being independent of an asynchronous delivery of a second digital content to a second unit in the multiple unit environment.

15 35. A method according to claim 34, wherein delivering the digital content includes enabling the unit to access an internetwork.

20 36. A method according to claim 34, wherein delivering the digital content includes delivering video to the unit.

37. A method according to claim 34, wherein receiving a request includes receiving a request for the digital content from a set-top box in the unit.

25 38. A method according to claim 34, wherein delivering the digital content includes:

accessing content metadata about the digital content;
accessing a filter from a user profile; and
delivering the digital content to the unit if the content metadata satisfies the filter.

30 39. A method according to claim 38, wherein delivering the digital content further includes denying the digital content if the content metadata does not satisfies the filter.

40. A method according to claim 38, wherein accessing a filter includes accessing the filter from the user profile stored in a memory on a second server.

41. A method according to claim 38, wherein:
5 delivering the digital content includes delivering a video to the unit;
accessing content metadata includes accessing a rating for the video;
accessing a filter includes accessing a maximum allowable rating from the user profile; and
delivering the digital content includes delivering the video to the unit if the rating is
10 below the maximum allowable rating.

42. A method according to claim 34, wherein delivering the digital content includes:
accessing content metadata about the digital content;
15 accessing user metadata from a user profile; and
conditionally delivering the digital content to the unit based on an interaction between the content metadata and the user metadata.

43. A method according to claim 34, the method further comprising billing the
20 unit for the delivery of the digital content.

44. A method according to claim 43, wherein billing the unit includes:
accessing a default rate for the digital content;
accessing a custom rate for the digital content;
25 accessing a rate key from a user profile; and
selecting the default rate or the custom rate for the digital content, based on the rate key.

45. A method according to claim 44, wherein accessing a rate key includes
30 accessing the rate key from the user profile stored in a memory on a second server.

46. A method according to claim 43, wherein billing the unit includes applying a discount for the digital content.

47. A method according to claim 34, the method further comprising:
accessing user metadata about a user profile; and
selecting an advertisement that matches the user metadata; and
5 sending the advertisement to the unit.

48. A method according to claim 47, wherein accessing user metadata includes
accessing the user metadata about the user profile stored in a memory on a second server.

10 49. A method according to claim 34, the method further comprising sending the
digital content from a second server to the server for storage until requested by the unit.

50. A method according to claim 34, the method further comprising:
accessing a bill for the digital content; and
15 displaying the bill in the unit.

51. A computer-readable medium containing a program to deliver digital content,
the program being executable on a computer system to implement the method of claim 34.

20 52. A method for delivering digital content from a second server to a first server
for storage, the method comprising:
receiving a request from the first server for access to a user profile stored in a memory
on the second server;
accessing user metadata about the user profile;
25 selecting digital content that satisfies the user metadata; and
sending the digital content to the first server from the second server for storage.

53. A method according to claim 52, wherein:
receiving a request includes receiving a request for access to a plurality of user
30 profiles stored in the memory on the second server;
accessing user metadata includes accessing user metadata about each user profile; and
selecting digital content includes selecting digital content that satisfies the user
metadata about at least a subset of the user profiles.

54. A computer-readable medium containing a program to deliver digital content from a second server to a first server for storage, the program being executable on a computer system to implement the method of claim 52.

5

Patent Application